

COLLAPSIBLE STORAGE BOX

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The subject invention relates to organizing structures for the truck beds of pick-up trucks. More particularly this invention is directed to a collapsible box that usually can be fastened to an upstanding wall of a pick-up truck bed. Most truck bed organizing structures, called truck boxes, tend to be large monolithic structures made of welded aluminum or injection molded structural foam. One problem with such boxes is that they tend to block much of the storage space in the truck bed by occupying usually the front two or three feet of the truck bed volume. Some truck boxes mitigate this blocking phenomenon by providing a so-called "cross bed" construction. A cross bed box is shallow so that it bridges across the truck bed since it is supported on either end by a protruding flange that rests on the upwardly facing surface of the sides of the truck bed. In this way the space beneath the cross bed box is freed for plywood sheets or other long, flat items. Such cross bed boxes are consequently quite shallow, even when they are built to project a substantial distance above the sides of the truck. Truck bed boxes tend to be quite heavy since they must structurally span the full width of the truck bed to keep the space below the box unrestricted.

Accordingly, it is an object of the subject invention to provide a truck box that permits a full depth box to collapse into a narrow compact stack against one wall of the truck bed, preferably the wall between the truck bed and the cab. It is another object of the invention to provide a truck box with bottom side walls and a lid that provides reasonable security and protection for the goods within the box, yet the box includes walls with hinged edges and surfaces that permit the truck box to selectively collapse into a narrow space within the truck bed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a perspective view of the collapsible storage box in the collapsed position and positioned against the front end of a pick-up bed.

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the lid of the collapsible storage box being lifted (pivoted) up to allow erection of the box from the collapsed condition.

Figure 3 is another view of the lid being pivoted.

Figure 4 shows the main compartment of the collapsible storage box being opened during erection.

Figure 5 shows the floor of the collapsible storage box being moved into place for assembly forming a space for storage.

Figure 6 shows the collapsible storage box fully erected with the lid open.

Figure 7 shows a golf bag being placed in the storage formed by the fully erected storage box.

Figure 8 shows the fully erected storage box with the lid in the closed position.

Figure 9 is a section taken along line 9-9 of ~~Fig. 8.~~ Figure 8.

Figure 10 is a section taken along line 10-10 of ~~Fig. 1.~~ Figure 1.

Figure 11 is an alternative embodiment showing the box executed in patterned aluminum sheet.

Figure 12 is another view of the second embodiment.

Figure 13 shows the way the side walls fold in the second embodiment.

Figure 14 shows the side walls and bottom wall in the erected second embodiment.

Figure 15 shows the side walls, lid, front and back walls in the erected second embodiment.

Figure 16 shows the hinged lip on the lid of the second embodiment.

Figure 17 shows positioning the bracket on the truck bed wall.

Figure 18 shows a pair of brackets positioned on the back wall of the truck bed ready to receive the collapsible truck bed box.

Figure 19 shows the bracket positioned on the back wall of the truck box.

Figure 20 shows the truck box and brackets, as they would appear installed in the truck bed.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The instant invention pertains to a collapsible storage box 1 in general, and particularly to a collapsible storage box suitable for use in a pick-up truck bed. While the description below focuses on the specific use of the box in a pick-up truck bed, it is contemplated that it could be used also in other settings, such as in a garage, car trunk, basement, and for general storage in virtually any location.

The first embodiment of the erected box 1, as shown in ~~Figs.~~ Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 includes a front wall 310, a rear wall 420, opposing end walls 410, a bottom wall ~~and a lid.~~ 500 and a lid 300. Each of the walls is made of a lightweight, rigid material, such as plastic, metal or wood. It is important for the material to be resistant to the weather elements, and maintain operability (not

be detrimentally affected by UV, salt, etc.) in extreme outdoor use conditions. For the purposes of this description, the uncollapsed or erected box is oriented so that the bottom wall preferably rests directly or indirectly horizontally on the truck bed support surface, the front, rear, and end walls extend 500 preferably rests directly or indirectly horizontally on the truck bed support surface, the front, substantially vertically from the bottom wall, and the lid rests horizontally on the top edges of the front, rear and end walls. rear, and end walls 310, 420 and 410 extend substantially vertically from the bottom wall 500, and the lid 300 rests horizontally on the top edges 900, 910 and 515 of the front, rear and end walls 310, 420 and 410.

The front wall 310 is pivotally attached along a pivot line 507 at either end to a front edge of a respective end wall 410. Each of the ends of the front wall 310 defines a rearwardly-extending flange 505 (see Figures 4 and 5 and 6) to space the pivot line 507 rearwardly from the back surface of the front wall 310. The flange 505 allows enough space between the pivot line 507 and the back surface of the front wall 310 to allow the bottom wall 500 to lay against the front wall 310 without interfering with the folding of the end walls 410 when the box is collapsed into its compact condition, as described below. The bottom edge 508 of the front wall 310 is pivotally attached to the front edge 512 of the bottom wall 500. Alternatively the bottom wall 500 could be pivotally attached to the bottom edge 600 of the rear wall 420. The lock mechanism can alternatively be located on the lid 300 so as to interact with a mating lock mechanism on the end wall(s) 410. The front wall 310 includes part of a lock mechanism which, when engaged with the mating lock mechanism 200 on the front hinged lip 302 of the lid 300, allows the lid 300 to be locked closed if desired.

The rear wall 420 is also pivotally attached at or near either end to the rear edge of a respective end wall 410. The lid 300 is pivotally attached along a rear edge to the top edge 910 of the rear wall 420. The top edge 910 of the rear wall 420 can define a horizontal plane, flange or rim 320, with the hinge 205 being located at the front of the horizontal plane, flange or rim 320 (See Figures 2, 6 and 7). The rear wall 420 in the instant invention is positioned adjacent to and in possible contact with the front wall of the pick-up bed 100. The rear wall 420 can be permanently fixed to the front wall of the pick-up bed 100 by adhesives, through-bolts, or other such types of fasteners such as shown in Figure 8. The rear wall 420 can also be removably fixed to the front wall of the pick-up bed 100, such as by a hook and loop type fastener (such as with hook and loop type fastener systems) or other removable fasteners. This would allow the box to be securely positioned in the truck bed, or removed, as desired by the user.

The end walls 410 each define a vertically extending pivot line, defined in the preferred embodiment by a hinge 415 such as a piano hinge, located halfway along their length from front to back. The pivot line splits each end wall 410 into a front section 411 and a rear section 412, and allows the front 411 and rear 412 sections to pivot to a position where they are side-by-side (See Figure 34). The hinge 415 is oriented on the pivot line to cause the end walls 410 to pivot inwardly into the interior of the box when collapsing the box from the erect condition.

The lid 300 includes a main body and a front lip 302 pivotally attached along a pivot line 305 to the main body. The front lip 302 bends from right angles to the main body (see Figures 4, 5, 6,

and 7) to extending in-line (substantially in a common plane with) with the lid main body 300 (see Figures 1 and 2). A locking structure is positioned midway along the length of the lip. The locking structure works in conjunction with a first mating locking structure on the top edge of the front wall to selectively lock the lid 200 is positioned midway along the length of the lip 302. The locking structure 200 works in conjunction with a first mating locking structure 314 on the top edge 900 of the front wall 310 to selectively lock the lid 300 when the box is in the erected condition. As mentioned before, the lock could be positioned elsewhere, and could also be made to work when the box is in the collapsed position. This is accomplished by providing a second mating lock structure 315, for example near the bottom edge 508 of the front wall 310 as shown in Figure 3. The locking structure 200 on the pivoting lip 302 aligns with this second mating lock structure 315 when the box is in its collapsed or stored position as shown in Figure 1, for example.

In operation, the box is easily converted from the collapsed condition to the assembled condition. In the collapsed position and the assembled position the back wall 420 remains in relatively the same position. The other walls pivot and move with respect to the back wall 420 between the collapsed and assembled position.

In the collapsed position (see Figure 1), the bottom wall 500 is folded upwardly along its pivot line with the front wall 310 to lay against the rear side of the front wall 310 (see Figure 4). The combination of the front and bottom walls 310 and 500 lay adjacent to but not in contact with the front surface of the rear wall 420. The combination of the front wall 310 and bottom wall 500 is able to be in such a position because the end walls 410 each bend inwardly along their respective center pivot lines (see Figure 3). As mentioned above, the flange 505 on either end of the front wall 310 spaces the pivot line 507 between the front wall 310 and each end wall 410 rearwardly to allow for the folded position of the bottom wall 500 against the front wall 310 without interfering with the end walls 410. Because each end wall 410 is folded, the front portion 411 and rear portion 412 of each lay against each other.

As referenced earlier, the bottom wall 500 could also pivotally attach to the bottom edge 600 of the rear wall 420. However, pivotally attaching the bottom wall 500 to the bottom edge 508 of the front wall 310 adds L-beam structure to the front wall 310, and also allows the user to more easily use one hand to collapse the front panel while keeping the bottom wall 500 from undesirably falling down.

In the collapsed position, the front wall 310, bottom wall 500, and folded end walls 410 are all stacked against the front surface of the rear wall 420. In this position these parts are under the rim 320 formed along the top edge 910 of the rear wall 420. The rim 320 is dimensioned to receive these folded parts underneath it. The lid 300 then folds downwardly over the other parts to encase them between the rear wall 420, rim 320 and lid 300. The lid 300 defines flanges extending downwardly 308 from the side edges to somewhat envelope the folded parts when in the collapsed position. When folded down in the collapsed position, the lip 302 on the lid 300 extends in a common plane with the lid 300 and helps cover the bottom edge 508 of the front wall 310. The lip 302 also adds L-beam structure to stiffen the lid 300 in the uncollapsed or

horizontal position. A second mating lock structure 315, like that used to engage the lock or locks on the lid 300 when the box is erected, could be provided at or near the bottom edge 508 of the front wall 310, so that the lip 302 on the lid 300 could be secured to hold the box in the collapsed position.

To convert the collapsed truck box to the assembled truck box, the lid 300, after unlocking the lock 200 from the second mating lock structure 315, if provided, is pivoted upwardly out of the way, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. The front wall 310 and bottom wall 500, still in their stacked configuration, are moved away from the rear wall 420, as shown in Figure 4. This causes the end walls 410 each to unfold along their pivot lines into substantially straight walls. See Figures 5 and 6. The bottom wall 500 is then pivoted away from the front wall 310 and into its horizontal position. In its horizontal position, the bottom wall 500 mechanically interferes with and blocks the inward bending of the end walls 410 about their pivot lines, thus keeping the box from accidentally collapsing. See Figure 5. If the bottom wall 500 is pivotally attached to the rear wall 420 then these steps would be slightly altered accordingly.

The truck box is now in its assembled position and ready to receive any articles that fit into the recess 700 formed by the walls. The lid 300 closes over the top of the open box, and contacts the top edges 900 and 515 of the front wall 310 and both end walls 410 to help keep out dirt and weather. The pivotal lip 302 can now be turned down to embrace the top, front surface of the front wall 310, and the lock 200 can be actuated to keep the lid 300 closed and secure the articles placed in the box.

As shown, the instant invention can be utilized as a carrier inside of a pick-up bed 105. The truck box can be positioned against, and preferably affixed to, the front wall of the pick-up bed 100, and when in the collapsed position it takes up approximately 3-4 inches of space. When in the open position, the box extends rearwardly to about the front end of the wheel wells 108 inside the truck bed (depending on the size of the truck bed 105 and the truck box). A wheel, (not shown) could be provided near the juncture of the front wall 310 and each of the side walls 410 to help support the front wall 310 when it is moved between its collapsed and expanded positions. Such wheels could also help the box ride over the initial sloping surfaces of the protruding wheel wells 108 at the corners of the erected truck box.

Each of the walls is approximately 1/4 to 1/2 inch in thickness if made of injection molded polymers or the like. The overall depth and width of the truck box is generally dictated by the height of the back wall 420 of the truck box. The truck box is generally as tall as the front wall of the truck bed 100. Depth is defined as the distance from the closed lid 300 to the bottom wall 500. Width is defined as the distance from the front wall 310 to the back wall 420. Length is defined as the distance between the end walls 410. Assuming that the lid 300 needs to cover the width of the truck box in the assembled condition, and the lid 300 needs to extend generally vertically when in the collapsed position, the width and height of the truck box is dictated by the height of the back wall 420. If these two assumptions are not required, then the truck box can be virtually any size when in the assembled condition and still collapse to a significantly smaller size when not in use.

Figure 9 is a section view through the truck box when in the assembled condition. Figure 10 is a section view through the truck box when in the collapsed condition.

The truck box can include other features and still function in the intended manner. For instance, the bottom wall 500 could be attached along its rear edge to the bottom edge 600 of the rear wall 420. Further, the rear wall 420 could be a little taller than the front wall 310, with the top edges 515 of the end walls 410 tapered to allow the lid 300 to slant downwardly and drain any liquid toward the front wall 310. To further enhance the weatherproof capabilities, the edges that mate when in the assembled condition, as well as the hinges, can be sealed by some manner such as by weather stripping or other such suitable treatment.

Since the truck box can be attached to the front or side walls of the truck bed 105, it can be elevated a couple of inches above the truck bed 105 to allow for storing things, such as long 2x4s, under the truck box. Further, the instant invention is believed to be the only such truck box with at least a floor 500, front wall 310 and a lid 300 that does not require fastening to the floor of the truck bed 105.

All pivot lines can be defined by piano hinges (continuous), or can be discrete hinges, living hinges, or any type of connection that allows the relative pivoting motion of two planar members with respect to one another. The piano hinge structure is preferred because it provides some structural rigidity to the storage box when in the assembled condition.

The instant invention has many advantages. There are no obtrusions on the floor of the truck box 105. The truck box folds to a collapsed position when desired by the user, and is in a vertical orientation when collapsed to avoid collecting water when not in use.

Alternatively, the end walls 410 of the instant invention could be eliminated so the side walls of the truck box could be used to keep objects in the truck box when in the erected position. In this embodiment, at least one hinged link (brace) would need to be positioned to connect the front and rear walls 310 and 420. Since it is hinged it would allow the front and rear walls 310 and 420 to collapse together. Likewise, the floor panel could be removed to use the bottom of the truck bed 105 if desired.

Figures 11, etc. show an alternative embodiment of the ~~invention~~-invention 1A. Here, rather than using injection molded plastic or the like to construct the various walls, panels and hinges, these are made from metal, preferably from the common aluminum sheet used for similar truck boxes having fixed and thus non-expandable shapes. The structures and functions are essentially identical with that shown in the first embodiment. Figure 13 shows a side wall 410A of the second embodiment in a partially expanded or collapsed position. The front wall 310A includes a flange 1300 that embraces the upper edge of the bottom wall 500A, which is contained within the flange 1300 and the side flange in this partially collapsed position. These and other flanges are formed using a conventional metal brake, although die stamping could be used to form the flanges along the edges and other structurally enhancing ribs and the like in the major faces of the

panels thus shaped. The side wall 410A has a vertical flange 1305 carried by one of the mutually hinged portions 415A of the side wall ~~410A~~. This vertical flange 1305 helps stabilize the side wall 410A in its fully erect position. Thus, the ~~user's~~ goods stored within the box 1A will not tend to bow the side wall 410A out thanks to this vertical flange 1305 which back stops the piano hinge positioned on the outside thereof. Figure 14 shows the bottom wall 500A now in its deployed position within the fully erected box. Note that this bottom wall 500A has flanges 1400 around each side edge and along the edge furthest away from the side edge opposite its edge hinged to the front wall ~~310A~~. Figure 15 shows the lid 300A of this embodiment with the pivotal lip 302A in its opened position. Ideally the hinge 1500 connecting the pivotal lip 302A with the rest of the lid 300A is integrally formed with the sheet metal. In Figure 16 the pivotal lip 302A is in its closed position where the lock structure can engage the first mating lock mechanism (not shown) in a manner similar to that shown with regard to the first embodiment. This pivotal lip 302A is preferably executed in a distinctive color or pattern so that the box can be customized or carry unique branding logos or trademarks.

As mentioned before, attaching the collapsible box structure to the side (in this case the front wall) of the truck box is an important step. Here a U-shaped bracket 1700 engages the front and back surface of that truck box wall and spans the lip connecting therebetween. Figure 18 shows these brackets 1700 positioned. Each bracket 1700 preferably has a large setscrew, which can be tightened towards the truck ~~box~~ bed wall 100 to engage below its lip, thus holding the bracket 1700 in place on the bed wall 100 and thus holding the box in the truck bed. The bracket 1700 also has protruding bolts 905, which engage corresponding holes in the back wall 420 of the truck box. These brackets 1700 can be first positioned at an appropriate location along the truck ~~box~~ bed wall. Then the truck box itself can be partially expanded so that nuts matching the protruding bolts 905 can be fastened once the bolts 905 are passed through appropriately provided holes through the ~~box's back wall~~ box's back wall 420. Alternatively the brackets 1700 can be pre-positioned on the back wall 420 of the truck box as shown in Figure 19. The resulting collapsible truck box is fastened to the truck bed by the front wall 100 as shown in Figure 20.

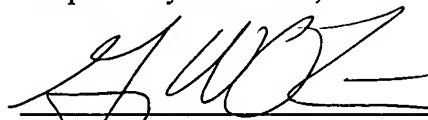
As mentioned previously, this bracket mounting system permits a properly rugged box to be suspended above the bottom wall 500 of the truck box. In this way construction materials or lumber as represented by the element shown can pass below the bottom wall 500 of even the fully expanded and erected truck box, giving extra versatility so that the truck box can expand over and can remain expanded or erected even though long elements being carried in the truck bed 105 extend into thus occupied space. As mentioned before wheels may be provided near the juncture between the front wall 310 and the side walls 410 to further support and aid in moving the truck box from its collapsed to its fully erect position.

While the invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to a preferred embodiment thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various other changes in the form and details may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

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If there are any remaining issues, Applicants respectfully request the Examiner phone
Applicants' attorney to resolve any such remaining issues. The issuance of a Notice of
Allowance is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,



Gregory W. O'Connor, Reg. #28,576
Attorney for Applicant
Samsonite Corporation
11200 East 45th Avenue
Denver, Colorado 80239
Telephone: (303) 373-6165